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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 007795

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL ECON AIID KPAL PTER EG IS
SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY FOR DISENGAGEMENT WOLFENSOHN'S
OCTOBER 9 CAIRO VISIT

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Quartet Special Envoy for Disengagement, James Wolfensohn visited Cairo October 9 and met with President Mubarak, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman, Defense Minister Tantawi, and Trade Minister Rachid. He briefed the Ambassador on the way out of town. Key points as follows:

-- On the Rafah crossing, Wolfensohn said the GOE could open the Gaza border as early as November 15. Sought USG help to press conclusion of deal as early as possible to reduce political tensions. GOE "neutral" on third party presence.

-- On Gaza settlement rubble, Wolfensohn found little GOE interest to move forward. Egyptians are now raising environmental and land title issues that they had not previously raised. Wolfensohn suggested that the current absence of PA Minister Dahlan may have dampened enthusiasm. Additional cost/benefit analysis may be required to facilitate conclusion of deal.

-- Wolfensohn focused on job growth and investment for Gaza/WB. GOE shares enthusiasm and will host investment promotion conference for Palestinian territories in November.

-- Success by PA in disarming militants key to next steps in Gaza development. GOE concerned that January PLC elections could again be postponed if disarmament does not take place. Egyptians working well with GOI counterparts.

End summary.

Rafah Crossing

¶2. (C) Wolfensohn told the Ambassador that EGIS Chief Soliman said Egypt would be prepared to re-open the Rafah border by November 15 at the earliest, but that mid-December was more likely. Israeli officials, he noted, were focused on mid-December as a target date for re-opening the crossing. Soliman detailed GOE expectations that people would cross at the Rafah Terminal, while goods would enter and depart Gaza via Israel's Kerem Shalom. Emergency and humanitarian travel between Gaza and Egyptian Rafah would continue to be addressed on an ad hoc basis during the interim. The GOE was reportedly "neutral" on the question of a third-party presence (i.e., European Union personnel) at the border crossing to monitor the flow of people and goods and customs collections. The Egyptians emphasized to Wolfensohn the importance of pressing Israel to come to final agreement rapidly on the border crossings issue. Similarly, Wolfensohn encouraged the Ambassador to press Egypt to commit to the earliest possible date for reopening the Rafah crossing. Should this crossing remain closed, he added, pressure will only increase on the Palestinian Authority, as militants may try to open the border by force, thereby putting the Egyptian Border Guard Force in the position of having to forcibly prevent Gazans from crossing into Egypt. Israel, he said, understands this dilemma and wants to avoid such a scenario. Soliman told Wolfensohn that Egypt would strengthen the Gaza border and maintain order there by force, as required.

Rubble: Back to Square One

¶3. (C) Wolfensohn said he raised the rubble removal issue in separate meetings with President Mubarak and EGIS Chief Soliman, but found little enthusiasm for moving forward. The Egyptians, he said, raised numerous "problems" (i.e., environmental concerns, national sovereignty, etc.) and were "not as explicit" on the subject as he had hoped. Still, he added, the issue "is not dead" but will require additional cajoling and cost/benefit analysis to see what will get the Egyptians moving again. He noted that PA Minister Mohamed Dahlan had been instrumental in early talks on this topic with the GOE, and that his current absence from Gaza may have slowed progress.

Investment, Job Security: Ultimate Security Guarantee

14. (C) Wolfensohn focused on job creation in Gaza and the West Bank, calling this the "ultimate security guarantee" for the Palestinians and Israelis. Noting Turkish and German industrial development commitments in the territories, he hoped Egypt may be interested in infrastructure projects in southern Gaza. Egyptian Trade Minister Rachid invited Wolfensohn to participate in a GOE-hosted investment promotion conference for Palestine to be held in Cairo this November.

Disarmament of Palestinian Militants Key

15. (C) Wolfensohn conveyed that the key to his own work is the successful disarmament of Palestinian militant groups, particularly in Gaza. Soliman reportedly agreed, and said that planned January Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) might be delayed if the PA is unable by that time to disarm Hamas and other militants. On security in general, he expressed his personal "surprise" at the moderation and solicitousness of senior Egyptian officials toward Israel. He told the Ambassador that the GOE's "tone" toward Israel on this visit had been "far more constructive" than had been the case several months earlier. GOE Defense Ministry officials had conveyed that they were preparing for a visit to Egypt by Israeli Defense Minister Mofaz.

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